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ABSTRACT

This final report discusses the activities and outcomes of the Achieving, Behaving, Caring Project, a program designed to prevent the development of serious emotional disturbance among children and youth with emotional and behavioral problems. The project had three main elements: (1) social skills instruction from a social skills curriculum chosen and taught by classroom teachers at least twice a week throughout the year to all children in the first and second grades; (2) a parent liaison from the local community who coordinated and facilitated regular communication between the parents and teachers of individual children; and (3) the Parent-Teacher Action Research (PTAR) model for developing consonance between home and school. The report explains each of these three elements and provides vignettes written by the parent liaison who coordinated with families around individual children. Results of the project indicated that compared to 18 controls, the 18 children participating in PTAR showed significantly greater reduction in internalizing behaviors, significant decreases in delinquent behavior, and improvements in cooperation and self control. PTAR parents rated themselves significantly higher than control parents for systems advocacy, knowledge base, and feelings of competence. (Contains 29 references.) (CR)

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End of Project Report for The Achieving, Behaving, Caring Project: Preventing the development of serious emotional disturbance among children and youth with emotional and behavioral problems

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I. Introduction

The Achieving, Behaving, Caring Project had three main elements: (1) **social skills instruction**, from a social skills curriculum chosen and taught by classroom teachers at least twice a week throughout the year to all children in the first and second grade; (2) a **Parent Liaison** from the local community who coordinated and facilitated regular communication between the parents and teachers of individual children; and (3) **Parent-Teacher Action Research (PTAR)**, a model for developing consonance between home and school. Each of these three elements is further explained and illustrated below in vignettes written by the parent liaisons who worked with families around individual children.

II. Social Skills Instruction

Whole-class **social skills instruction** was provided to all participants and their classmates by their first and second grade teachers, according to a curriculum selected by each school's staff. To maintain minimum standards of consistency, teachers agreed to: (a) whole-class instruction for a minimum of 15-20 minutes twice per week; (b) instruction spanning October through May, using the same curriculum for both first and second grade; and (c) regular communication from teachers to parents about the social skills lessons. All social skills curricula covered four general areas: communication, interpersonal skills, personal skills, and response skills. Programs chosen by schools included: Lion's Quest (Quest International, 1990); Responsive Classroom (Charney,

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1992); Second Step (Beland, 1988); Skillstreaming the Elementary School Child (McGinnis, E., & Goldstein, 1984); Taking Part (Cartledge & Kleefeld, 1991); and a multi-year teacher developed program. To establish treatment fidelity for social skills instruction, ABC facilitators periodically examined classroom materials and questioned teachers during PTAR meetings about their adherence to standards (a) through (c).

Teaching social skills in the classroom established expected norms for student behavior. Students who have difficulty behaving appropriately in school found that positive behaviors were reinforced for them not only by their teacher, but by other students as well. Social skills curricula were also shared with parents in PTAR meetings so that when they engaged in inappropriate behaviors, children received the same response whether they were at home or school. Consistency in behavioral expectations between home and school and in responses to undesirable behavior greatly increased students' ability to learn how to behave well in both settings.

Tom's Story [1], by Carol Benway, Parent Liaison

Tom was an only child who had always lived alone with his mother, Kimberly. Since birth, he had been accustomed to having lots of individualized attention. He learned at a very early age that having temper tantrums, often accompanied by head banging, upset his mother so much that we would get his own way. Kimberly also encouraged these behaviors by catering to Tom and allowing him to interrupt her any time he pleased. Because Kimberly was a single, working parent, she had very little time for socializing, so Tom never had much opportunity to play with other children until he entered the school setting. In kindergarten, Tom often interrupted his teacher and others in class, and he had a very hard time making friends. Because of these social skill problems which carried over into first grade, he was recommended for the ABC Project, beginning his first grade year.

Susan, Tom's first grade teacher chose to team teach a structured social skills curriculum with Fran, a second grade teacher, by combining their first and second grade classrooms. The curriculum was called Skillstreaming the Elementary School Child (McGinnis, E., & Goldstein, 1984) Skillstreaming breaks social skills into categories, such as listening skills, and then describes different steps for each skill so that they are easy to learn for young children. Both

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[1] All names used in vignettes are pseudonyms.

teachers were hesitant to start this curriculum but knew they had to do so as part of the requirements of being involved in the ABC project. They soon discovered, however, that when they carried out the Skillstreaming curriculum throughout the classroom day, both the first and second grade children responded very positively to the skills being taught. When a child wasn't paying attention or listening well, the class would be reminded of the steps for listening skills. If a student was asking for help that he or she might not really need, Susan or Fran would suggest that he/she ask him/herself the skills streaming question, "Can I do this alone?" If someone was being teased by others, the teacher might remind the whole class about the social skill of responding to teasing.

Through the discussions in our PTAR meetings, Susan and Fran provided Kimberly with these same Skillstreaming steps that she could follow at home with Tom when she needed them. Kimberly began making Tom do more and more for himself. When he complained, she would remind him to ask himself if he could do the task alone. She posted the listening skills steps on her refrigerator, and when Tom interrupted her, or did not listen to what she was saying, she would remind him of the steps. Sometimes it was extremely hard for Kimberly to follow through, especially when Tom would become upset, but she put a lot of effort into being consistent.

Because of the combined efforts of Kimberly, Susan and Fran, Tom's behavior improved greatly. He was able to make better choices in the classroom as well as on the playground because of the new skills he had learned. And his academic performance improved as well, because he was able to stay on task and do more for himself. (5/22/97, and 5/5/98). The social skills intervention proved to be a large part of what Tom needed in order to do better in school.

An important part of Tom's success with learning from the social skills curriculum had to do with the fact that his mother reinforced his lessons at home in a manner that was consistent with that of his teacher. Different role expectations between home and school are inevitable, but some children have a difficult time with the lack of continuity. Children can become confused if they engage in behaviors which may not upset their parents at home, but which disrupt the classroom and elicit a negative response from their teachers at school. For these reasons, strong home-school communication is vital so that parents and teachers can work as a team to encourage behaviors in children which are adaptive and beneficial in both settings. Sometimes teachers and parents need help in bridging the gaps that might exist between them in language, education, attitudes toward schooling, and beliefs about the reasons behind a student's behavior.

III. The Parent Liaison

Parent Liaisons are an important link between schools and homes. Often, parents who did not have positive educational experiences as children have a great deal of trouble feeling comfortable communicating with their children's teachers, or they may have trouble understanding the technical language of an educational professional or specialist. Teachers who have had negative experiences with disgruntled parents may feel nervous about working closely with other parents. Some teachers have difficulty with the idea that even though they have expertise about educating children, parents have a lot of important knowledge about their own children that could help make a student's educational experience more successful. Encouraging these teachers and parents to work as equals is the job of the parent liaison.

Olivia's Story by Kim Hewitt, Parent Liaison

Olivia Stauffer was a very quiet little girl whose internalizing behaviors and social isolation made her a candidate for the ABC project. When I called Olivia's home to discuss the project with her parents, her father answered the phone. I learned that Barry Stauffer was in the midst of a bitter divorce from Olivia's mother.

At our first meeting, the teacher and Barry decided that they wanted to work with Olivia on speaking up for herself more, and on trying to overcome the great sadness she felt about her parents' divorce. My biggest goal with this team was to help Barry see the importance of these meetings for his daughter. He often canceled meetings, or simply would not show up. He was very apologetic, making many excuses for why he could not make time for the meetings. When he did come to the meetings, he often arrived late, which greatly upset Olivia's teacher because she felt he was wasting her time. As the parent liaison I played the mediator, pointing out to the teacher how hard being a single parent must be for Barry. I saw that it was important to calm the teacher down so that she could focus on Olivia and the small improvements she was making, even though her progress was slow. At our meetings, I kept reiterating the mutual goal that "Olivia will express her feelings when asked." I also helped the team to focus on the importance of "I statements" in meeting this goal. This process was reinforced by an agenda every time we met.

I really feel that if I as the parent liaison had not been an active member in this team they would not have met at all. As the divorce progressed, Barry decided to sell his house and move in with his parents in Riverton because living next door to his ex-wife was too difficult for

him. Olivia had to make the difficult transition to a new teacher because of changes in the school staff. The ABC project stayed with her through these changes. During the second year Barry was canceling meetings, or not showing up even after being reminded. Several times he tried to send his mother instead. I explained to him that he had started the project and only he could finish it. I went on to say that he had a very active role in this project as the father and no one could replace him. During this talk I tried to be stern, yet praising, and it seemed to work. Barry showed up more for meetings on time after this. Although the meetings seemed to be mostly informative for him about parenting skills, I think it really helped him. His effort showed up in Olivia's progress in speaking up for herself. As Barry become more confident and self empowered, Olivia seemed to pick this up. "She even spoke up loudly in a play that she participated in," said her teacher.

In the two years of this project, Olivia changed teachers three times. The consistency of expectations offered by the PTAR process was important for her growth, and this could not have been achieved without the regular meetings between myself, Barry, and her teachers. With each new teacher it was my role as the parent liaison to share the information of what the team had done, what goals they were working on, the progress Olivia had made both personally and academically. Without my intervention each teacher would have had to start working with Olivia from ground zero. Through this process and with my participation, Olivia was always moving forward towards a goal. This consistency is so important to kids whose lives are in turmoil like Olivia's. At our last meeting the teacher said that Olivia had come up to tell her that a child was bothering her. Olivia had asked him to stop teasing her, and whe· he continued, she came to get an adult. That showed real progress.

Sometimes even parents who care deeply about their child's success in school have difficulty interacting with teachers. The Parent Liaison in this case played an important role in helping Barry see how important his presence was in meetings about his daughter's education. The parent liaison was also instrumental in provided some continuity for Olivia who was moving frequently from school to school. Because the Parent Liaison was employed by the project, independent from the school, she was able to remain impartial in conflicts between Barry and the teacher, and she was able to remain with Barry and Olivia even when they moved to another community. Without the Parent Liaison's presence, it is doubtful Barry would have continued communicating with Olivia's teachers, but this communication was absolutely vital for Olivia to continue learning how to assert herself. In other cases, parent liaisons connected parents with

valuable resources about parenting skills, mediated compromises between parents and teachers, or simply made themselves available as sympathetic listeners. In every case, the Parent Liaison took notes at meetings in the participants' own words, and supplied meeting agendas that were modeled after the Parent-Teacher Action Research process.

IV. Parent-Teacher Action Research Process (PTAR)

Parent-Teacher Action Research is a four step structure that greatly encouraged collaboration between participating homes and schools. PTAR teams set goals for the student, collected data about the student's progress, developed a practical theory about why the student behaved the way he or she did, and developed an action plan to try and encourage more positive behavior. This structure was the basis for PTAR meeting agendas, and helped teams stay on track, focusing on the student's needs and progress. Because the team was continually collecting data, they adjusted their action plans if they found that what they had tried originally was not working for the student.

Drew's Story, by Sandra Paquette, Parent Liaison

Drew Lembaud was involved with the ABC Project during his first and second grade years at Adams Elementary School. The Parent Teacher Action Research Team for Drew included myself as the parent liaison, Drew's mother, Frederica Lembaud and his teacher, Sonya Reynolds. Drew had been at most of our team meetings with his sister, Selena. We used the research model for our meeting agendas, going through the steps of setting goals, collecting data, developing a practical theory, developing an action plan with specific roles and responsibilities, and then beginning the research process over again.

At the first meeting, the team went through the Making Action Plans process to develop a clear picture of who Drew was ***(MAPS;*** *Forest and Pearpoint, 1992). The MAPS structure allowed us to talk about Drew in positive terms, and encouraged us to build on his strengths rather than dwell on what might be "wrong" with him. At the next few meetings the team observed that Drew seemed to repress his feelings until something or someone would set him off, then he would explode emotionally* ***(Data Collection and Analysis)****. Once he lost control he*

would have a hard time regaining it. He was full of anger, which was disruptive at home, and especially at school. Sonya believed that the catalysts for Drew's outbursts were clashes with other students when he felt that something was not fair. ***(Practical Theory)*** *She saw that the other children shied away from him when he exploded, eliminating the possibility of 'talking it out'. Drew's behavior was also pushing away his family and friends. With this information in mind, the team decided to help Drew express and discuss his feelings.* ***(Action Plan)*** *Throughout the first year, Frederica and Sonya both kept journals, noting when Drew felt out of control or overreacted to a situation* ***(Continuing Data Collection)****. By the second year of the project, both Frederica and Sonya added to their records of Drew's behavior a description of how they had responded to him and what Drew did next* ***(Continuing Data Analysis)****.*

During team meetings, the Parent-Teacher Action Research process proved extremely important. It helped us to keep on task and always be clear about our purpose, as well our different roles and responsibilities. This process helped to create and contribute to the changes that occurred with Drew over time. This process also allowed our team to move along at a fairly steady pace, always evolving, always growing, making necessary changes in our strategy along the way. The more we met as a team and the more we used this research process as a vehicle for creating change, the clearer and more specific we all became regarding Drew's feelings and behaviors, and what to do about them.

The process of learning to deal calmly with his emotions was an ongoing one, but small steps forward were visible. Before the project, Drew did not usually consider how his behavior affected other people. One incident was encouraging, and showed that he was becoming more responsive to feedback from others. Drew had exploded verbally in the classroom at another student named Terence, greatly upsetting him. Sonya spoke to Terence about how it felt to be treated like this by someone. A few minutes later, at recess, Sonya saw Drew go up to Terence and talk to him, patting him on the back to try to make him feel better. Frederica and Sonya felt that Drew was realizing he wanted to feel better about things, and that there were ways to accomplish this, such as talking, compromising, or ignoring the actions of others that annoyed him.

By the end of the project, Drew learned to deal with his feelings by talking, rather than acting out. He learned to recognize when he was out of control and needed space, and learned to state this. He learned to say, 'I'm having a bad day and I need some time alone.' This was a big step for him to express his feelings and ask for space, instead of acting out his feelings-- a mature skill. Though it continues to be an ongoing process, Drew's relationships with his peers have improved tremendously. With help from his mother and teacher, and the PTAR process, Drew has learned to be a better friend.

The first step in Parent-Teacher Action Research was to try and develop a picture of the student using the Making Action Plans (MAPS; Forest and Pearpoint, 1992) process so the team could learn how to capitalize on what the student could do well. The MAPS process was an

important part of the first Parent-Teacher Action Research meeting because it provided a way for all members of the team to talk about aspects of the child's behavior that impeded his or her success in school without dwelling on the negative. This approach worked from the strengths of children, rather than focusing only on problems. In summary, the four Steps used in the Making Action Plans Process during the first PTAR meeting are: 1) The entire team brainstorms about the student's strengths and challenges. 2) Parent and teacher describe their dreams for the student. 3) Parent and teacher describe their concerns for the student. 4) The team develops goals that capitalize on the student's strengths, keeping in mind each person's fears and dreams. Throughout this process the Parent Liaison is vigilant that everyone speaks, everyone is heard, and everyone understands. Team meetings were governed by the Ground Rules for PTAR, which were: 1) Parents always speak first. 2) Anyone can choose to pass or stop at any time. 3) All ideas are recorded into meeting notes in the team members' own words. 4) All ideas are to be expressed as positively as possible. At the first meetings everyone decided how to collect data and would plan to come to the next meeting prepared with lots of observations and clues about the student's behavior.

Data collection was an integral part of the Parent-Teacher Action Research (PTAR) process. It was important to establish at the first meetings how members of the team would collect data. PTAR teams used methods to collect data such as journal keeping, anecdotes, school work, standardized test scores, and coded notes between teacher and parent. Every meeting was carefully recorded in note form by the parent liaison, using the original wording of each team member. It was important that the kind of data collection agreed upon by a team be something every member can perform, so that parents were just as capable of collecting meaningful data as

teachers and vice versa. It was not necessary, however, for parents and teachers to collect data in exactly the same way. Variety often led to a rich understanding of a student and the progress he or she was making.

Data Analysis was a time for reflection. Parents and teachers shared their data with one another. In their conversations, each had an opportunity to reflect on what s/he had observed. Part of this reflection process involved asking "How does what I do as a parent or a teacher contribute to this behavior?" This was a very important step, and required a high level of trust between parents and teachers. Facilitators needed to be comfortable with long silences during this part of the meetings, and careful not to jump in with their own thoughts and observations. It sometimes took several meetings before parent or teacher would talk aloud about changing their practices. Any decisions to change teaching or parenting practices were much more powerful when they arose from self reflection. After data analysis, the next step was to develop a **practical theory** about the student's behavior. A practical theory is an informal guess about the *reasons behind* a child's behavior or challenges. It was helpful for teams to look at what function could be fulfilled by the child's behavior. All the actions the teams took to help the child were based on their Practical Theories.

Subsequent PTAR meetings followed an agenda based on previously established goals, beginning with a summary of the previous meeting. Parents shared their observations of the child, while facilitators helped to clarify and connect observations to previously established goals. Next, the teacher reported her or his observations, which were also connected to the goals. Facilitators guided the PTAR teams as they progressed through the action research cycle, asking questions to promote reflection, identifying practical theories of team members, suggesting ways to carry out

action plans that encompassed both home and school, and offering support to parents and teachers (for details, see McConaughy et al., 1998). The process involved frequent praise and recognition of efforts by both parents and teachers. In the end, facilitators summarized the meeting and action plans to be taken prior to the next meeting. The team then set a date for the next meeting. Notes written by Parent Liaisons documented each team meeting and were distributed to all parties. The frequency of PTAR meetings ranged from once a week to every six weeks, with most occurring for one-hour once a month. For Cohort 1, project researchers acted as facilitators at team meetings. For Cohort 2, Parent Liaisons gradually assumed the facilitator role after the first few meetings, while project researchers attended subsequent meetings throughout Years 1 and 2 at the request of Parent Liaisons.

Between meetings, Parent Liaisons contacted parents at least once to support them in collecting data, carrying out action plans, and confirming the time of the next PTAR meeting. Parent Liaisons also referred families to resources in the school and community, whenever parents requested additional services. Parent Liaisons kept detailed field notes, and for supervision, training and peer support, met once a month with project researchers. This process, along with a common protocol for meetings, helped to establish treatment fidelity for the PTAR teams.

The team then develops an **action plan** based on their practical theory. The action plan is a way to try and encourage positive behavior in the child both at home and at school. As mentioned above, one team's action plan was to reinforce classroom social skills lessons at home by reminding the student of the steps he had to go through in order to listen politely. Another team included a speech pathologist in addition to the parent and teacher, and all three dedicated time to working with the student to improve his pronunciation of words and sounds that were

difficult for him. The action plan was something parents and teachers agreed to, and their ability to follow through on the action plan was important to its success in supporting the student as he or she tried to learn more appropriate behavior. The action plan naturally brought expectations for behavior, and consequences for misbehavior, into alignment between home and school.

V. Expected Outcomes

Expected Outcomes for Individual Students

The ABC Project anticipated that . . .

1. . . . Parent Teacher Action Research teams would achieve their own individual and academic achievement goals for each student.
2. . . . each child would acquire and practice 1st and 2nd grade social skills in the school-based social skills curricula as measured by Achenbach's Child Behavior Check List (1991a), Teacher Report Form (1991b), and Direct Observation Form (1986), and Gresham & Elliott's Social Skills Rating System (1990).
3. . . . each child would not have EBD as a primary or secondary handicapping condition, as measured by a review of school records.

Expected Outcomes for Individual Parents

The ABC Project anticipated that . . .

1. . . . each parent would be actively involved in setting and achieving goals for their child, as measured by participation in PTAR teams.
2. . . . each parent would feel competent as a guide and advocate for their child's education, as measured by an adapted school version of the Family Empowerment Scale.
3. . . . each parent would be aware of the social skills curriculum taught in their child's

classroom, measured by self-report.

Expected Outcomes for Individual Teachers

The ABC Project researchers expected that . . .

1. . . . each teacher would adopt a social skills curriculum in collaboration with other first and second grade teachers, measured by self report, and that they would teach it a minimum of twice a week for at least twenty minutes each time.
2. . . . teachers would communicate information about the social skills curriculum to all parents on a regular basis, measured by documents collected by parent liaisons.
3. . . . teachers would collaborate with parents in setting and achieving goals for their children, as measured by participation in the PTAR team.
4. . . . teachers would make instructional decisions based on observational data they collected on children,
5. . . . that teachers would demonstrate a commitment to the PTAR process, measured by their willingness to extend the amount of time devoted to PTAR meetings, and continuing to participate with the second cohort.

Expected Outcomes for the Targeted Sample (Group B)

The ABC Project anticipated that. . .

1. . . . children in Intervention B (PTAR students) would demonstrate improved social skills compared with the rates of children in intervention A (social skills only students), as measured by both the parent and teacher form of the Social Skills Rating System.
2. . . . children in Intervention B would demonstrate fewer behavioral/emotional problems compared with the rates of children in Intervention A, as measured by the Child Behavior

Check List and the Teacher Report Form.

3. . . . children in Intervention B would demonstrate fewer behavioral/emotional problems compared with the rates of children in Intervention A, measured by the Child Behavior Checklist and Teacher Report Form.

4. . . . there would be a decreased rate of referral for special education due to Severe Emotional Disturbance of children in Intervention B compared with the rates of children in Intervention A during grades one and two.

VI. Effectiveness

Sample Selection/Participants

Two separate cohorts were selected in consecutive years using a multiple gating system, depicted in Figure 1 (See Appendix). At Gate 1, Kindergarten teachers used the Systematic Screening for Behavior Disorders (SSBD; Walker & Severson, 1990) to identify children in their class with externalizing (disruptive or aggressive) or internalizing (affective or emotional) behaviors. The initial screening was conducted with 13 Kindergarten teachers in 7 schools for Cohort 1 and 20 teachers in 9 schools for Cohort 2. All schools were in rural settings except one, which was in a semi-rural setting. Each Kindergarten teacher listed up to 5 Externalizers and 5 Internalizers based on descriptive characteristics provided by the SSBD and then ranked the students from highest to lowest on each dimension. Teachers then rated the identified children on the SSBD Critical Events Index (CEI) and Combined Frequency Index (CFI) of adaptive and maladaptive behaviors. Gate 1 procedures identified 189 potential participants across the two cohorts.

At Gate 2, children were identified who had suitable matches for gender, SSBD-

designated Internalizer or Externalizer, and placement with same first grade teacher. Gate 2 yielded 121 eligible participants, for whom all but two had at least one critical event on the SSBD-CEI. (Using the SSBD cutoffs on the CEI and CFI was not feasible for sample selection due to small class sizes in many of the rural schools in the project.)

At Gate 3, a Parent Liaison personally contacted parents to describe the project and to seek permission for their child to participate. Ninety one percent of Cohort 1 parents and 94% of Cohort 2 parents agreed to the project conditions and gave permission to have the Kindergarten teacher complete the Teacher's Report Form (TRF; Achenbach, 1991b). Parents also agreed to complete rating forms and to permit first and second teachers to complete the TRF and other rating forms described in the instruments section. Gate 3 yielded 108 eligible participants.

At Gate 4, pairs of eligible children were matched for gender, the same first grade teacher, SSBD or TRF Internalizer or Externalizer, and TRF Total Problems score. Each member of a matched pair was then randomly assigned (by a coin flip) to a PTAR team or a control group, resulting in 18 matched pairs for Cohort 1 and 23 matched pairs for Cohort 2. There were no significant group differences in Kindergarten TRF Total Problems T scores (PTAR Group = 58.0; Controls = 58.5), nor any other TRF problem scale, demonstrating the success of the matching process. There were also no significant group differences for TRF academic performance or adaptive functioning, nor parental socioeconomic status (SES) scored on Hollingshead's (1975) 9-point scale. Among 81 participants, 47% obtained a Kindergarten TRF Total Problems T score $\geq$60 ($\geq$82nd percentile), which marks the borderline clinical cutpoint for differentiating referred from nonreferred children (Achenbach, 1991b). (One Kindergarten teacher failed to complete the TRF.) In addition, 46% scored at or above the borderline clinical cutpoint for TRF Internalizing

and 41% scored at or above the same cutpoint for TRF Externalizing.

Cohort 1 consisted of 28 boys and 8 girls, attending 8 different schools with 14 first grade and 16 second grade teachers. Cohort 2 consisted of 28 boys and 18 girls, attending 12 different schools with 20 first grade and 29 second grade teachers. Except for 5 pairs, both of the matched PTAR and control children were in the same first grade classroom. Nineteen pairs of children had the same teacher for first and second grade. Children with mental retardation or physical disabilities were excluded from the study in order to focus interventions on problems that were not complicated by low cognitive ability or physical limitations. Data were also collected on 12 additional children in Cohort 1 and 7 additional children in Cohort who could serve as substitute controls for dropouts from Year 1 to Year 2. However, only 2 substitute controls were necessary in the transition from Year 1 to Year 2, and these children were not in the same classroom as their PTAR matches. Parents and teachers each received equal stipends for their participation in the project.

Results

Reductions in Problem Behavior

On the Teacher Report Form (TRF; Achenbach, 1991), teachers reported significant reductions in Internalizing problems for both PTAR and control group children, with particular reductions on the TRF Withdrawn scale. These time effects were medium, accounting for 6.9 to 8.3% of the variance. However, the PTAR group showed significantly greater reductions in TRF Internalizing than the matched control group, producing a small interaction effect (5.1% of the variance). Teachers also reported a significant decrease in TRF Delinquent Behavior for the PTAR group, in contrast to an increase in Delinquent Behavior for the control group, a medium

interaction effect (6.9% of the variance).

On the Child Behavior Check List (CBCL; Achenbach, 1991), PTAR and control group parents reported significant reductions over time across may more problem areas than did teachers, including CBCL Total Problems, Internalizing, Externalizing, Withdrawn, Thought Problems, Delinquent Behavior, and Aggressive Behavior. Large time effects were obtained for CBCL Total Problems (24.9% of the variance) and Externalizing (20.6% of the variance), along with a medium effect for CBCL Internalizing (11.5% of the variance). On CBCL Total Problems, the PTAR group showed a greater decrease than the control group, producing a small interaction effect (5.7% of the variance). On CBCL Delinquent Behavior, the PTAR group's scores decreased, whereas the control group's scores increased, a medium interaction effect (9.7% of the variance). Across both groups, parents also reported significant reductions on the Social Skills Rating System-P Total Problems, Externalizing, and Hyperactive scales (SSRS; Gresham & Elliott, 1990). However, the PTAR group showed significantly greater decreases in SSRS-P Externalizing scores than the control group, a small interaction effect (5.5% of the variance).

The interactions effects on the TRF, CBCL and SSRS-P demonstrated incremental benefits of PTAR teams over and above benefits of whole-class social skills instruction for reducing teacher and parent-reported delinquent behavior, teacher reported internalizing problems, and parent-reported externalizing problems. We reported similar interaction effects for TRF Delinquent Behavior at the end of Year 1 for Cohort 1, but not for CBCL Delinquent Behavior (McConaughy, Kay and Fitzgerald, 1998). The differences in findings for Year 1 versus Year 2 suggest that decreases in PTAR children's delinquent, or rule breaking, behavior were evident earlier to teachers than to parents, but that by the end of second grade both teacher and

parents observed reductions in such behavior.

Increases in Competent Behaviors

Over the two year period, teachers and parents reported significant improvements, averaged across both groups, for SSRS Total Social Skills and Self-Control, producing medium to large effects (7.0-12.7% of the variance). Teachers also reported improvements for both groups in Cooperation, a small effect (5.3% of the variance), and Assertion, a large effect (20.7% of the variance), whereas parents reported improvements in Responsibility, a medium effect (13.1% of the variance). Because all identified at-risk children received two years of social skills instructions along with the rest of their classmates, these reported improvements in social functioning were not surprising. Analyses of TRF Adaptive Functioning and Academic Performance also indicated significant improvements over time averaged across all children, producing medium effects (6.6% to 7.8% of the variance).

Unlike teachers, PTAR group parents reported significantly greater improvements than control parents on SSRS-P Cooperation and Self Control and CBCL Total Competence, all medium effects (7.5% to 9.8% of the variance). These results demonstrated incremental benefits of PTAR teams for improving children's competencies as well as for reducing problems reported by their parents. PTAR group parents also obtained higher total scores than control group parents on the FES-S, a medium effect (6.2% of the variance), indicating that they felt a greater sense of empowerment in obtaining school services for their children by the end of the two year period. In particular, PTAR parents rated themselves significantly higher than control parents for systems advocacy, knowledge base, and feelings of competence. Again, it was notable that none of the FES-S interaction effects had been apparent at the end of Year 1 for Cohort 1. These findings

suggest that, for many parents of young children at risk, collaboration with teachers must span more than the child's first year in school to produce significant changes in their perceptions of their children's behavior or in their feelings of empowerment in acquiring school services.

VII. Unexpected Outcomes

The ABC Project researchers had not expected to see. . .

1. . . . that of all parents approached by the ABC Project for participation in the project, 91% in Cohort 1 and 94% in Cohort 2 agreed to project conditions.
2. . . . that of all participating families, the ABC Project only three families left the project, one because a student was classified with SED and her family had to begin participation in more intensive interventions, one because of involvement of Social and Rehabilitation Services, and one because the family moved beyond the reach of the project staff. (Many children moved to other communities within Vermont, and whenever possible, Parent Liaisons followed them to continue the PTAR process.)
3. . . . that Parent Liaisons would be able to carry on as facilitators of the PTAR process without the presence of research staff.
4. . . . that Parent Liaisons would be motivated and capable of writing proposals for state and local funds to replicate the ABC Project.
5. . . . such a high degree of effectiveness in reducing internalizing problem behaviors in children. The researchers theorized that this was a direct result of parent involvement in setting goals for children's behavior and education within the context of PTAR teams because educators are more likely to notice and be concerned about externalizing behaviors. Parent involvement opened perceptions of what types of behavior warranted

attention and intervention.

VIII. Implications

Practical Application of the ABC Model

The ABC Project has shown great potential for practical application in other educational and community contexts. In May 1999, Pam Kay was approached by an administrator in Toledo, Ohio who had read about the ABC Project in the publication Prevention Strategies that Work (1999) and was interested in replicating the ABC Model in his school. A group of school psychologists in New Hampshire in the Fall of 1999 requested that Pam Kay come give them a presentation about ABC because they were interested in the model as a guide for conducting interventions in their school systems. Jacqueline Rhuman, a researcher in Hawaii who is involved in school reform on the state level, is interested in establishing the ABC Project, among others, as a systemic reform in the statewide Hawaiian school system. In December of 1999 ABC Project staff wrote an Outreach Proposal for funding from OSEP to replicate the ABC Model in urban and suburban school systems in Vermont. Notification of funding is pending. Finally, Kim Hewitt, a Parent Liaison who worked with the original ABC Project research team, wrote a proposal for funding from the Vermont Children's Trust Fund in April of 2000 to replicate the ABC Model in Richmond, Vermont so that it can remain as a self-sustaining structure available to all interested children and families in Richmond Elementary School.

Applicability of the ABC Model to Disabilities Other Than ED

Anecdotal evidence from the ABC Project strongly suggested that the ABC Model can be applied as an effective intervention for disabilities other than ED. A first grader with an articulation disorder was chosen for a PTAR team based on his kindergarten teacher's responses

on the SSBD, corroborating a strong correlation described in the literature between articulation disorder and ED. There were many improvements in this child's behavior that were similar to changes for other children in the ABC Project (McConaughy, Kay & Fitzgerald, in press). Kyle's scores on the Teacher Report Forms (TRF; Achenbach, 1991a) indicated a marked decrease (from approximately 53 to 36, see Figure 2) in the incidence of his internalizing behaviors. The Child Behavior Checklist (CBCL; Achenbach, 1991b) filled out by his mother ranked Kyle near the top of the list of ABC children whose total competence had improved dramatically, (from a score of 40 to 48, see Figure 3). Independent observers who did not know the ABC Project or Kyle, also reported a significant improvement in his classroom and recess behavior on the Direct Observation Form. Most significantly, however, Kyle's improvement in his speech articulation was dramatic, and suggests that PTAR is a model that can be effective as an intervention for articulation disorder, illustrated below in a vignette about Kyle. Further research in this area may reveal that the applicability of PTAR extends to numerous disabilities. A longitudinal study of the ABC Model might demonstrate a high degree of effectiveness in supporting students with disabilities within the general education setting.

Kyle: An Example of PTAR as an Intervention for Articulation Disorder, By Sandra Paquette

Kyle was a first grader with challenges in his speaking skills when he began with the ABC Project. He was often teased by the other children on the school bus about the way he talked, which made him so sad that he did not want to ride on the bus anymore. His mother, Stephanie, formed a Parent Teacher Action Research Team for Kyle with his teacher, Sonya Reynolds, and the speech pathologist for the school, Tyne Scott. Kyle sometimes came to the team meetings with his two brothers, Ryan and Dylan. The PTAR Team met regularly, setting goals, collecting data, developing a practical theory, developing an action plan with specific roles and responsibilities and then beginning the research process again.

The team decided to work toward three goals for Kyle. He would want to be on the bus, he would work on his speech, and he would continue to show gains in his speech development. To deal with the teasing by the other children, the team decided that Kyle should tell Stephanie and Sonya when he had been picked on by other students. For a time they monitored the situation,

but finally asked the Principal to have a talk with the other students on the bus. The teasing stopped after this.

Tyne was already working with Kyle on different words to develop his speech skills, and she began to give lists of these words to Sonya and Stephanie. All three scheduled times they would work on the word lists with Kyle so that he was being reinforced on new sounds every day. It was crucial that Kyle always feel encouraged about his progress in his speech, so the entire team rallied behind him. In fact, it was written in the minutes of one team meeting that "The reason that Kyle's speech is progressing so well is because he has such massive team support from Stephanie, Sonya, and Tyne, and that he is totally immersed in a speech program. Kyle is also committed to his program on a daily basis, and works hard with each of the team members." At a later meeting the team noted, "Kyle feels successful with his speech and with working with Stephanie, Sonya, and Tyne. He is able to see all of the progress he has made, and this helps to reinforce his motivation and commitment to his efforts."

After only one year, the team started to make notes like this: "Kyle has made incredible progress with his speech development. Before, he was not only difficult to understand in terms of his speech, but he also had little confidence in terms of speaking to other people. For Kyle to choose to read an excerpt front his journal to the whole class shows that he has grown in his self confidence. Also, Tyne observed that she could understand every word he was reading!" The team was concerned that Kyle was having trouble keeping up with the rest of the class in spelling. The team wrote in their minutes that "Sonya will modify the spelling program that she was using with the whole class . . . with Kyle because he is having difficulty keeping up with the rest of the class in terms of writing words. She has modified this program with other students as well. Plan: Kyle will be asked to pair up with another student who will do the writing, but both will see, track, and say words."

After a year and a half of hard work, Kyle now speaks much more clearly and confidently. His progress has been outstanding. Tyne, an experience speech pathologist, reflected, "I have never seen a child with this type of articulation disorder make so much progress in such a short time, and I'm sure that his excellent progress is due to the efforts of the ABC Team. Kyle is committed to working on his speech developments and has been internally motivated, which is being very mature for his age. It is because of him and the rest of the PTAR Team that such incredible progress has occurred." Stephanie was also extremely pleased with her son's progress. "The ABC Project has been a great program for my son. I don't think his speech would have improved the way it has. As a team we work well and hard to make this happen. Most of the credit goes to my son because he never gave up. He works really hard. I think that without this program his gains wouldn't have been as great as they were. My son's gains have made him more proud of himself and more confident in himself. I think that there should be more programs out there like this one. All children need this help in their early years to get a boost in their education." Because the PTAR team was careful to monitor Kyle's challenges and strengths, they could tailor the program to suit his needs. The PTAR process helped the team and Kyle to make outstanding advances in his speech, and therefore in his confidence.

IX. Replication and Dissemination

Annotated list of publications and articles that feature the ABC Project.

McConaughy, S.H., Kay, P.J., Fitzgerald, M. Preventing SED through parent-teacher action research and social skills instruction: First year outcomes. (1998). Journal of Emotional and Behavioral Disorders, *6, 81-93.* Discusses results for children whose parents participate in PTAR for two years, showing significant increases in competent skills and significant reductions in problem behaviors.

McConaughy, S.J., Kay, P.J., Fitzgerald, M.F. (1999). The Achieving, Behaving, Caring Project for preventing ED: Two - year outcomes. Journal of Emotional and Behavioral Disorders, *7, 224-239.* Discusses data results for children after two years in the ABC Project. Significant improvements in competencies, and reductions in problem behaviors are demonstrated.

Prevention strategies that work: What administrators can do to promote positive student behavior. (1999). Burlington, VT: Department of Education, University of Vermont. Prevention Strategies is a booklet and web page describing six different projects designed for the prevention of Emotional Disorders in elementary and middle school students. The booklet and its accompanying web page were produced by a design team of researchers from across the country, all of whom were funded under the same category of "Research to Practice" by the United States Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs. Pam Kay coordinated the production of Prevention Strategies. Thus far, approximately 20,000 copies of Prevention Strategies have been distributed nationwide, through a mailing to all members of the American Association of School Administrators, and to many school and social service administrators upon request through the web site.

Kay, P.J., Ryan, A.K. (2000) Does your school use prevention strategies? Communiqué, *28, 6, center insert.* The main article discusses the need for strategies for the prevention of ED in elementary schools. Brief descriptions of each of the projects featured in Prevention Strategies that Work, including the ABC Project, are featured in center inserts which are designed to be used as originals for xerox copies that school psychologists can share with school staff and parents.

Algozzine, R., Kay, P.J., eds. (2000) Untitled. *Manuscript in development for contract with Corwin Press.* ABC is one of many projects featured in the book. The book contract is a direct result of Prevention Strategies that Work.

Kay, P.J., Fitzgerald, M., McConaughy, S. (2000) ABC Project Manual. *Manuscript in development.* Manual will describe PTAR, the role of the parent liaison and social skills lessons, and will give information to administrators, parents and teachers who are interested in developing an ABC Project within their school.

McConaughy, S.J., Kay, P.J., Fitzgerald, M.F. (In press.) How long is long enough? Exceptional Children. Results show that the model is more effective when employed for two years, rather than for one year.

Ryan, A.K. Kay, P.J., Fitzgerald, M.F., Paquette, S., Smith, S. Parent-teacher action research: An intervention for emotional and speech disorders. (In press.) Teaching Exceptional Children. A case study of the progress of a young boy with articulation disorder whose mother, teacher and speech therapist intervene with the ABC Project. The young boy's progress was exemplary of improvements in behavior of the overall sample, and there is anecdotal evidence that the intervention was particularly successful in helping him make strides forward with his speech ability. The manuscript is being prepared for publication in Teaching Exceptional Children.

Annotated list of presentations given about ABC.

Fitzgerald, M.D., McConaughy, S., & Kay, P.J. (1997 February). Achieving, behaving, caring: The ABC's of early intervention. 10th annual research conference, research and training center for children's mental health. Tampa, FL. Gives a description of the ABC model, the research methods used, and reports preliminary findings from data, emphasizing dramatic results from the Direct Observation Form.

Kay, P.J. (1997 March). Whose child is this? -Readers theatre exploring the sociocultural tensions experienced by a parent and a teacher around a child's emotional and behavioral issues. American Educational Research Association Conference. Chicago, IL. Uses a readers theater format to describe the different points of view and the struggles of a parent and a teacher who are trying to work together around a child who is at risk for developing Emotional Disorder. The content is drawn from data generated by one child's PTAR team in the ABC Project, such as interviews of the parent and teacher depicted, notebooks each kept while doing action research, field notes from team meetings and the notes kept by the parent liaison who worked with them. Faculty from the University of Illinois at Chicago read the parts of the parent and teacher, with Pam Kay acting as narrator and lead presenter.

Kay, P.J., Benway, C. (1998 April). The essential role of parents as members of the research team in early intervention for children with emotional and behavioral issues. Discusses the role of the Parent Liaison in PTAR, and how Parent Liaisons facilitate parent involvement.

Fitzgerald, M.D., Kay, P.J., Hewitt, K., Cummings, D., Hooper, S. (1999 April). Symposium on parent-teacher action research and children's success in school. Spring conference of the New England Educational Research Organization. Portsmouth, NH. A

presentation about the affect of PTAR as a framework to encourage parent-teacher collaboration. The presentation was given by the co-directors Kay and Fitzgerald, along with a parent liaison, a parent and a teacher from an exemplary PTAR team.

Kay, P.J., Hewitt, K., Fitzgerald, M.F., Paquette, S. (1999 May). Something so Simple: A commentary on parent-teacher action research and the achievement of children who are at risk for emotional and behavioral disabilities. Annual conference of American Educational Research Association, Montreal, Quebec. A discussion of the efficacy of PTAR as an intervention for children who have emotional and behavioral disorders. Presented by principal investigator, project coordinator, and two parent liaisons.

Kay, P.J., Paquette, S., Hewitt, K., Tillotson, M., Gillespie, L., Olsen, H. ABC: PTAR and children's emotional and behavioral needs. (1999 June) Annual BEST Summer Institute of Vermont, Montpelier, Vermont. Describes components of the ABC Project, is the rough draft of a pending manual which describes ABC.

Kay, P.J. (2000 March). Children with emotional and/or behavioral problems: After early identification, then what?. Annual Pacific Rim Conference, Honolulu, HI. Clearly outlines the steps of the Achieving, Behaving, Caring Project, and describes the efficacy of the model.

Kay, P.J. (2000 March). Making strong connections between parents and teachers through PTAR. Annual conference of the National Association of Elementary School Principals. New Orleans, Louisiana. Clearly outlines the steps of the Achieving, Behaving, Caring Project, emphasizing home school collaboration through PTAR, and describes the efficacy of the model.

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Figure 1

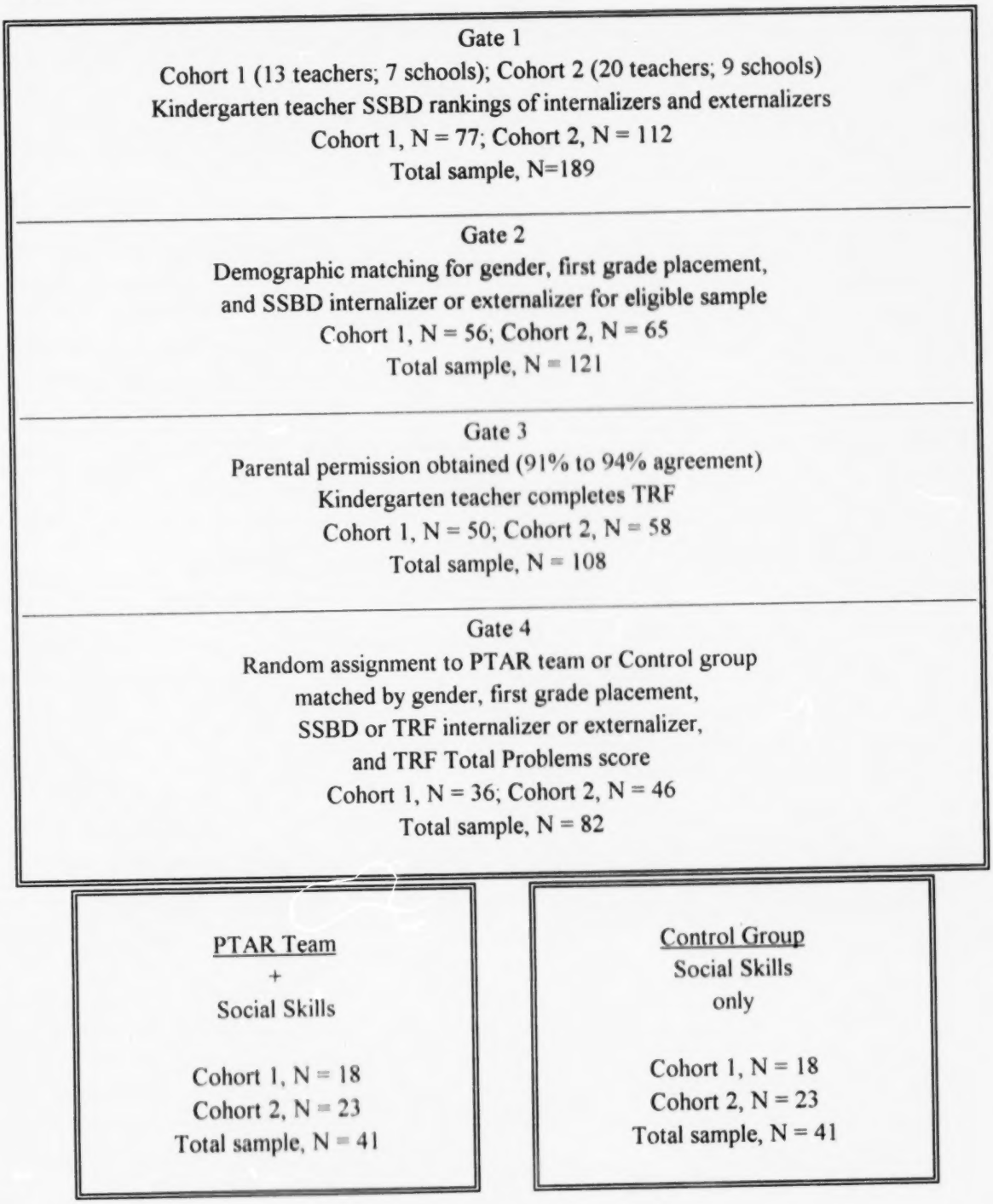
Gate 1
Cohort 1 (13 teachers; 7 schools); Cohort 2 (20 teachers; 9 schools)
Kindergarten teacher SSBD rankings of internalizers and externalizers
Cohort 1, N = 77; Cohort 2, N = 112
Total sample, N=189
Gate 2
Demographic matching for gender, first grade placement,
and SSBD internalizer or externalizer for eligible sample
Cohort 1, N = 56; Cohort 2, N = 65
Total sample, N = 121
Gate 3
Parental permission obtained (91% to 94% agreement)
Kindergarten teacher completes TRF
Cohort 1, N = 50; Cohort 2, N = 58
Total sample, N = 108
Gate 4
Random assignment to PTAR team or Control group
matched by gender, first grade placement,
SSBD or TRF internalizer or externalizer,
and TRF Total Problems score
Cohort 1, N = 36; Cohort 2, N = 46
Total sample, N = 82
PTAR Team
+
Social Skills
Cohort 1, N = 18
Cohort 2, N = 23
Total sample, N = 41
Control Group
Social Skills
only
Cohort 1, N = 18
Cohort 2, N = 23
Total sample, N = 41

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Figure 2

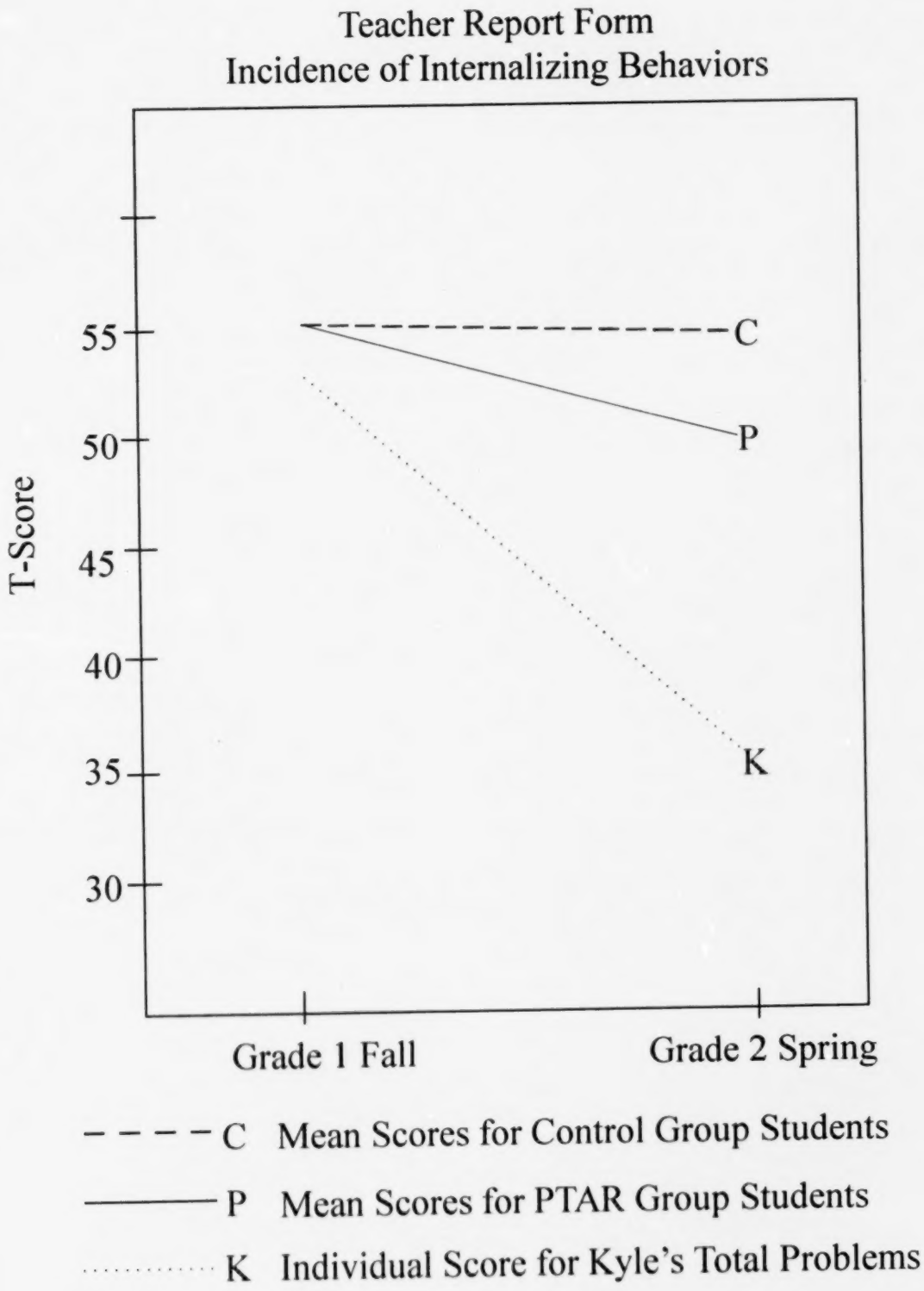
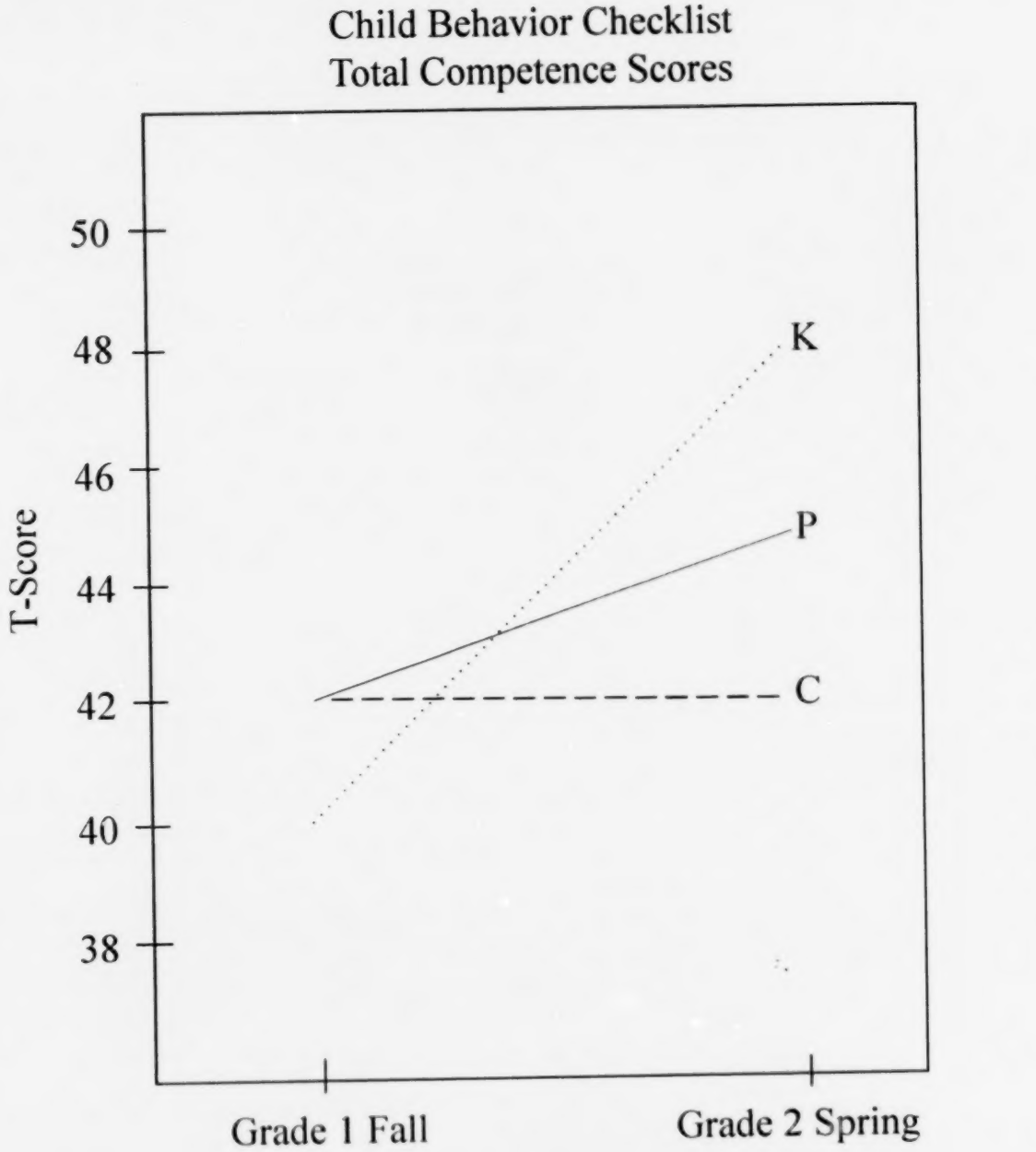

Teacher Report Form
Incidence of Internalizing Behaviors
T-Score
55
50
45
40
35
30
C
P
K
Grade 1 Fall
Grade 2 Spring
C Mean Scores for Control Group Students
P Mean Scores for PTAR Group Students
K Individual Score for Kyle's Total Problems

Figure 3


Child Behavior Checklist
Total Competence Scores
T-Score
50
48
46
44
42
40
38
K
P
C
Grade 1 Fall
Grade 2 Spring
K Individual Score for Kyle's Total Competence
P Mean Scores for PTAR Group Students
C Mean Scores for Control Group Students